

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

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AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 SAN JOSE 00297

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:; 08,5, CS

SUBJECT: COSTA RICAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN MOVES INTO FINAL WEEK

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: AS COSTA RICA MOVES INTO THE FINAL WEEK OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEFORE THE NATIONAL BALLOTING ON FEBRUARY ;0 DANIEL ODUBER, CANDIDATE OF THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT PARTY, THZWQK# HAS FINALLY JELLED HIS

CAMPAIGN AND IS OPTIMISTIC HE WILL OBTAIN THE NE ESSARY 40 PERCENT TO AVOID A RUNOFF. THE UN AND MAIN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE, FERNANDO TREJOS ESCALANTE, HAS REFRAINED FROM SHARP PROPAGANDA ATTACKS, PREFERRING EAUNKVNUI# CAMPAIGN AT

A HIGH LEVEL. TREJOS' SUPPORTERS ARE WORRIED THAT THIS TACTIC WILL BENEFIT ODUBER WHO HAS DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO PORTRAY HIMSELF AS THE BEST EQUIPPED TO LEAD THE COUNTRY, THUS HOPING TO REDUCE HIS VULNERABILITY TO ATTACKS ON THE RECORD OF THE CURRENT PLN ADMINISTRATION. THE TWO IMPORTANT MINOR CANDIDATES, RODRIGO CARAZO (PRD) AND JORGE GONZALEZ MARTEN
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(PNI), CONTINUE TO CAMPAIGN IMPRESSIVELY WITH HEAVY EXPENDITURE ON ORGANIZATION AND MEDIA, BUT THEIR CAPACITY

TO PULL VOTES REMAINS THE BIG UNKNOWN. THE ELECTION WILL BE LARGELY DETERMINED BY THE RELATIVE PERFORMANCE OF THE PARTY ORGANIZATIONS ON ELECTION DAY. AS THE PLN AND THE UN ARE THE ONLY TWO PARTIES WITH TRULY NATIONAL MACHINE ORGANIZATIONS WE MUST STILL CONCLUDE THAT THE RACE WILL BE BETWEEN ODUBER AND TREJOS, DESPITE CARAZO'S FAST FINISH, AND THAT ODUBER SHOULD CERTAINLY WIN A STRONG PLURALITY IF NOT THE PRESIDENCY ON THE FIRST BALLOT. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE ELECTORATE WILL OVERCOME ITS TRADITIONALLY OVERWHELMING PREDILECTION TO POLARIZE AROUND THE TWO MAIN CANDIDATES AT THE LAST MINUTE WILL DETERMINE IF SECOND ELECTIONS ARE NECESSARY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FINAL WEEK -- AS THE COSTA RICAN NATIONAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN MOVES INTO THE FINAL WEEK, THE OUTCOME REMAINS MURKY BUT SOME ELECTORAL SHIFTS SEEM TO BE IN THE WIND. THE MAJOR QUESTION, THAT WILL ONLY BE ANSWERED AFTER THE POLLS ARE CLOSED, IS WHETHER THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF COSTA RICAN VOTERS WILL POLARIZE BETWEEN THE TWO FRONTRUNNING CANDIDATES, DANIEL ODUBER OF THE PARTIDO LIBERACION NACIONAL (PLN) OR FERNANDO TREJOS ESCALANTE OF THE UNIFICACION NACIONAL (UN), OR WHETHER AN IMPORTANT MINORITY WILL ABANDON THE MAJOR PARTIES FOR ONE OF THE TWO CHARISMATIC "MINOR" CANDIDATES, RODRIGO CARAZO OF THE PARTIDO RENOVACION DEMOCRATICA (PRD) OR JORGE GONZALEZ MARTEN OF THE PARTIDO NACIONAL INDEPENDIENTE (PNI). IN PAST ELECTIONS THIRD PARTY CANDIDATES HAVE NOT DONE WELL, MOSTLY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT CAMPAIGNED VIGOROUSLY AND WERE BADLY UNDERFINANCED. BOTH CARAZO AND GONZALEZ MARTEN ARE SUFFICIENTLY FINANCED TO CONTINUE THEIR AGGRESSIVE

MEDIA CAMPAIGN AND ORGANIZATIONAL WORK.

3. WHILE SPENDING CONSIDERABLY LESS THAN ODUBER AND TREJOS, THEY ARE FOCUSING THEIR CAMPAIGNS ON THOSE SECTORS OF THE POPULATION WHERE THEY HAVE THE MOST POTENTIAL AND PAYING SLIGHT ATTENTION TO AREAS WHERE THEY HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF WINNING VOTES. CARAZO'S EMPHATIC CAMPAIGN MESSAGE THAT THE VOTER SHOULD "THINK BEFORE HE VOTES" COUPLED WITH HIS SOLID
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MIDDLE CLASS IMAGE IS EXPECTED TO DRAW MORE HEAVILY IN URDMN AREAS, PARTICULARLY IN THE HEAVILY POPULATED CENTRAL PLATEAU. GONZALEZ MARTEN, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS CAMPAIGNED PARTICULARLY HARD IN RURAL AREAS WHERE IT IS BELIEVED HE HAS MADE SOME INROADS AMONG CONSERVATIVE AND LESS WELL-EDUCATED CAMPESINOS. CARAZO HAS CONSERVED THE LARGEST PART OF HIS FINANCIAL RESOURCES UNTIL THE VERY END OF THE CAMPAIGN WHEREAS GONZALEZ MARTEN HAS TENDED TO SPEND HEAVILY EARLIER LEAVING HIS PARTY IN DIFFICULT FINANCIAL STRAITS FOR THE HOMESTRETCH. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS

SURPRISING HOW MUCH MONEY THESE TWO CANDIDATES ARE SPENDING GIVEN EARLIER REPORTS OF THEIR FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS. CARAZO HAS APPAREFFLY MANAGED TO FLOAT A LOAN OF COLONES 5 MILLION IN DECEMBER FROM THE TOWER NATIONAL BANK IN COLON, PANAMA, WHILE GONZALEZ MARTEN HAS SOLD A CHOICE PIECE OF DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE REAL ESTATE TO PLN-CONNECTED BUSINESSMEN (ACTING ON ODUBER'S ORDERS) FOR AN INFLATED PRICE DESIGNED TO HELP KEEP GONZALEZ MARTEN ALIVE BUT NOT OVERLY DANGEROUS.

4. THE UN'S PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, DR. TREJOS, SEEMS TO HAVE LOST SOME OF HIS PUNCH IN THE LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS. PART OF THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY DUE TO HIS NEED TO CONSERVE HIS SHORT MONEY SUPPLY FOR THE LAST TWO DAYS OF THE CAMPAIGN, BUT SOME MAY BE DUE TO DEMORALIZATION AMONG HIS CADRE. THE UN HAS IN FACT BEEN RELUCTANT TO STAGE FREQUENT MASSIVE PUBLIC RALLIES, A COMMONLY ACCEPTED CAMPAIGN TACTIC HERE TO SHOW VOTER SUPPORT, BUT THIS AGAIN MAY SIMPLY REFLECT BUDGETARY CONSERVATISM OVER A CAMPAIGN INSTRUMENT OF QUESTIONABLE PRODUCTIVITY OR, MORE SERIOUSLY FOR THE UN, IT MAY BE OUT OF FEAR THAT ITS CANDIDATE WILL DRAW LESS THAN THE PLN. THE UN CARAVAN OF 1,500 VEHICLES THROUGH DOWNTOWN SAN JOSE ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 20, WAS A RESORT TO A TECHNIQUE THAT WAS INEXPENSIVE AND RAN NO RISK OF A POOR POPULAR TURNOUT WHILE PROVIDING AN IMPRESSIVE SHOW OF UN STRENGTH.

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R 252215Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
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INFO AMEMBASSY MEXICO
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5. ALSO, TREJOS' PROPAGANDA HAS STILL NOT RETURNED TO ATTACK THE PLN IN TONES THAT CHARACTERIZED HIS FALL CAMPAIGN. SOME OF HIS WORRIED SUPPORTERS HAVE EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN OVER HIS PERSONAL DECISION TO KEEP THE CAMPAIGN HIGH LEVEL AND THUS PLAY INTO ODUBER'S HANDS. (THE PLN CAMPAIGN HAS SOUGHT TO HOLD ODUBER ABOVE PERSONAL ATTACKS BY HIGH-LIGHTING HIS GREATER CAPACITY TO LEAD THE COUNTRY.) THEY HAVE SO FAR UNSUCCESSFULLY URGED HIM TO CAPITALIZE BETTER ON HIS OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTACKING THE PLN. FOR EXAMPLE, PRESIDENT FIGUERES' REMARK LAST WEEK THAT TREJOS BEHAVES AS THOUGH HE HAD TOO MANY DRINKS AT A PARTY--A REFERENCE TO TREJOS'S REPUTATION AS A HARD DRINKER--HAS NOT BEEN PICKED UP BY UN CAMPAIGNERS WHEN IT COULD EASILY BE EXPLOITED WITHOUT FEAR OF ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL SANCTIONS.

6. BY THE SAME TOKEN, ODUBER'S CHARGE LAST WEEK THAT THE UN IS PLANNING FRAUD ON ELECTION DAY WENT THREE DAYS BEFORE UN TACTICIANS MANAGED TO CATCH UP WITH IT. ODUBER'S CHARGE, WHILE CALCULATED TO FIRE UP HIS LOCAL CADRE, COULD EASILY BACKFIRE IF THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES CAN EFFECTIVELY
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PORTRAY IT AS A PLN ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN AWAY IMPENDING DEFEAT, SOMETHING, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO DO. HIS CHARGE MAY ALSO COST HIM SUPPORT AMONG UNDECIDEDS BECAUSE HE HAS DARED TO IMPUGN AN ELECTORAL PROCESS WHICH COSTA RICANS GENERALLY AND WITH PRIDE CONSIDER UNCORRUPTABLE.

7. TRENDS -- THE EMBASSY SEES THE FOLLOWING TRENDS AMONG THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES. CARAZO IS MOVING VIGOROUSLY UPWARD, BUT FROM A DISTANT THIRD AND MAYBE FOURTH POSITION; GONZALEZ MARTEN HAS NOT GROWN IN RECENT WEEKS AND MAY HAVE EVEN LOST A FEW PERCENTAGE POINTS; TREJOS HAS CLEARLY NOT GROWN AS RAPIDLY AS HIS SUPPORTERS HAD HOPED BY THIS TIME. WHAT MAY BE HAPPENING HOWEVER IS THAT THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE MERELY TRADING VOTES AMONG EACH OTHER WHILE LEAVING ODUBER'S BASIC STRENGTH RELATIVELY UNTOUCHED. IF THIS IS TRUE THEN THE PLN POLLS, WHICH INDICATE THE FOLLOWING, CAN BE TRUSTED: ODUBER--42 PERCENT; TREJOS--30 PERCENT; CARAZO--12 PERCENT; GONZALEZ MARTEN--8 PERCENT; COMMUNIST PARTIDO ACCION SOCIALISTA (PASO) CANDIDATE MANUEL MORA VALVERDE--NEARLY 4 PERCENT; AND

THE REMAINING 6 PERCENT DIVIDED BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS, G. W. VILLALOBOS, AND SOCIALIST CANDIDATE JOSE FRANCISCO AGUILAR BULGARELLI.

8. THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATION -- IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, HOWEVER, AND BARRING ANY MOMENTOUS ERROR BY ODUBER, THE PLN ORGANIZATION ON ELECTION DAY MAY WELL BRING ABOUT HIS VICTORY BY A SMALL MARGIN. THE PLN AND THE UN ARE THE ONLY TWO PARTIES WHO HAVE MANAGED TO RECRUIT ENOUGH REPRESENTATIVES TO MAN EACH OF THE 4,815 POLLING PLACES OR "MESAS"--AN IMPORTANT INDICATION OF GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZATION. CARAZO AND GONZALEZ MARTEN ARE NOT REPRESENTED AT SEVERAL HUNDRED OF THESE POLLING PLACES. SUCH A LACK OF REPRESENTATION SUGGESTS THAT OTHER CRUCIAL ELEMENTS OF THEIR MACHINES SUCH AS BLOCK WARDENS AND TRANSPORTATION ARE ALSO DEFICIENT. ODUBER HAS EXPERIENCED SOME DEFECTION OF LOW LEVEL CADRE, MOSTLY TO CARAZO, AND TREJOS HAS HAD SIMILAR PROBLEMS WUZH TRADIT EUOAL UN ACTIVISTS MOVING TO GONZALEZ MARTEN. DESPITE THESE PROBLEMS, ODSGER, ?)9:(##53. 33MS TO ENK
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MORE METICU LOUSLY MANAGED THAN TREJOS'. THE PLN SEEMS TO HAVE DRIVEN ITS ORGANIZATION DEEPER INTO THE ELECTORATE THAN THE UN, SO THAT DESPITE THE UN'S EXTENSIVE USE OF COMPUTERS TO IDENTIFY AND COMPILE LISTS OF PARTISANS, THE WORK OF LOYAL PLN CADRE ON ELECTION DAY COULD MEAN A CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE IN FAVOR OF ODUBER.

9. WITH THE PLN CAMPAIGN'S LATEST SHIFT IN PROPAGANDA FOCUS, THIS TIME TO PORTRAY ODUBER AS THE ONLY CANDIDATE CAPABLE OF LEADING THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE DIFFICULT PERIOD THAT LIES AHEAD, TOGETHER WITH PURD, HOUSE-TO-HOUSE AND RA
HY WORK THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRZMN ODUBER'SSZPERATION SEEMS TO HAVE FINALLY JELLED. ODUBER AND HIS CADRE ARE BECOMING DISTINCTLY MORE CONFIDENT THAT VICTORY WILL BE THEIRS ON THE FIRST ELECTION. ALTHOUGH CADRE CONFIDENCE IS BRIMMING OVER, SPONTANEOUS PARTICIPATION AT PLN RALLIES HAS BEEN NEITHER OVERWHELMING NOR PARTICULARLY WARM, SUGGESTING AGAIN THAT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ORGANIZATION WILL BE IMPORTANT IN GETTING OUR THE VOTE.

10. PLN WILL NOT GAIN MAJORITY IN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY -- THE OUTLOOK FOR THE SIMULTANEOUSLY HELD LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS REMAINS AS PROJECTED IN SAN JOSE'S A-007. THE PLN WILL DO SUBSTANTIALLY BETTER IN THE ASSEMBLY THAN ANY OTHER PARTY, BUT WILL, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE FIGUERES FIRST TOOK OFFICE IN 1953, LOSE ITS MAJORITY. THIS W

ELD NOT
NECESSARILY DOOM A PLN OR UN LEGIY
ATIVE PORBYRAM, BUT WILL
FORCE SOME "UNITY MOVES" TO FORM A WORKING
COALITION. FOR AN ASSESSMENT OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW
LEGISLATS E AND PROSPECTS FOR COALITION ARRANGEMENTS
THE INTERESTED READER SHOULD REFER TO SAN JOSE'S A-007.

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11. CONCLUSION -- THE LAST WEEK OF THE CAMPAIGN IS
TRADITIONALLY THE TIME WHEN THE POLITICAL PARTIES RELEASE THEIR
BEST AND MOST SCATHING PROPAGANDA. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS
BEEN NOTHING ESPECIALLY DRAMATIC YET, INDICATIONS ARE THAT
NEXT WEEK'S PERFORMANCE WILL NOT DISAPPOINT THOSE
WHO HAVE LONG WAITED FOR SOME EXCITEMENT. DEPENDING ON THE
PROPAGANDA, SOME LAST-MINUTE SHIFTS IN VOTER
SYMPATHIES CAN BE EXPECTED. POLITICAL PLANNERS CLEARLY REMEMBER
THE LESSON OF 1966 WHEN THE HIGHLY FAVORED ODUBER LOST THE
ELECTION IN THE LAST THREE DAYS WHEN ATTACKED FOR BEING IN
LEAGUE WITH THE COMMUNISTS. ALL THE CANDIDATES PLAN TO
INCREASE THE INTENSITY OF THEIR CAMPAIGNS AND SPEND
PROPORTIONATELY MUCH MORE THAN AT ANY TIME PREVIOUSLY.

DESPITE ALL THE EFFORTS BY THE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES,
ODUBER IS THE FAVORITE TO WIN THE PLURALITY. NEXT WEEK'S
CAMPAIGN AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE
RESPECTIVE PARTIES' PERFORMANCES ON ELECTION DAY WILL
BE CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT TO WHETHER HE WINS THE
PRESIDENCY ON THE FIRST BALLOT.

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